

**To: WI Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice**

**Re: AB-326 (Requirements for sex offenders on school premises) & AB-421 (Special operator licenses & ID cards for persons registered as sex offenders.)**

From: Ms. Taku Ronsman, 1688 Beaver Dam Drive, Green Bay WI 54304

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**October 16, 2007**

Dear Criminal Justice Committee,

I drove from Green Bay to speak to you for 2 reasons:

- 1) Like everyone else, I want to live in a community that's safe for children and their families.**
- 2) I want to be sure the state passes sex offender laws that reflect known "best practices."**

Steve Ronsman, my husband of 19 years, is on the sex offender registry for a 2<sup>nd</sup> degree sex offense he committed 12 years ago. He served 6 months in jail under the Huber law and was on supervision for 6 years. Had he violated supervision guidelines, he would have gone to prison for 5 years.

I'm the one who reported him to the authorities. I was devastated when I learned what he had done. I went to therapy to cope with the situation. It took me several years before I could forgive him. He received 7 years of therapy. He learned empathy for the victim, tools to control unwanted sexual fantasies, appropriate ways to deal with stress, and he regained the self-esteem that he had lost during his childhood.

Maybe some of you think there is something wrong with me that I stayed married to a sex offender. That's what one of the Green Bay aldermen told a constituent, and what some of my neighbors have said about me. But I know staying married was the right thing to do because strong family support contributes to an offender's rehabilitation.

Therapy has transformed Steve. The victim has forgiven Steve, and now all we want is for our family to live a normal life. But that's impossible when the legislature as well as local communities pass punitive, shaming sex offender laws. Society needs to learn to forgive also.

I strive to be a good citizen and to help make our community a better place to live. In addition to volunteering for a variety of organizations, I started a Neighborhood Association and served on the Mayor's neighborhood Leadership council. Last year I was honored in the Bay Business Journal as 1 of 50 people you should get to know. This year, in honor of the Chamber of Commerce's 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, I was listed as one of 125 people that have contributed to the well-being of the community. I want to continue to make a difference, as well as have my husband serve the community thru volunteering with me. We don't deserve to be the victims of vigilantes that are driven to fear by ignorance that is fueled by punitive, shaming sex offender laws.

Please heed what I am saying. AB-326 and AB-421 (as well as that horrible proposed sex offender license plate law) will cause harm to sex offenders and their families and will do absolutely nothing to prevent crime. In fact, **passing punitive shaming laws puts former offenders like my husband more at risk of a relapse by making them outsiders instead of participants in the community**

It's time for the legislature to stop this counterproductive witch-hunt against sex offenders who have served their time and want to live a normal life. Instead, the legislature needs to start promoting community educational programs as recommended by the WI Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Inc.

**I am asking you for 3 things:**

**1) Oppose AB-326, and support in it's place AB-332, which more appropriately creates child safety zones restrictions only while sex offenders are on supervision.** Being forced to call the school district office every time there is an activity attended at a school is a form of cruel and unusual punishment that shames and humiliates offenders who have served their time and been rehabilitated. It also puts the safety of the former offender in jeopardy.

**2) Oppose AB-421.** Sex offenders who committed a violent or other serious sex offense are already listed publicly on the state Sex Offender Registry. An operator's license or ID stating SEX OFFENDER on it will serve no productive purpose while it shames and humiliates sex offenders (who have paid for their crime) and shames their families. Again, it puts the safety of the former offender in jeopardy.

**3) Ask the WI Dept. of Corrections what their needs and recommendations are ...then give them what they want so they can apply known "best practices" in our communities.**

According to Dept. of Corrections Field supervisor Jed Neuman, there are 4 critical success factors when transitioning sex offenders back into the community: residence, employment, treatment, and a positive support group. Punitive, shaming laws are counter to the 4 critical success factors.

The Dept. of Corrections has access to the latest research as well as the expertise to determine what works to reduce recidivism and what is counterproductive. Please don't tie them down with rigid mandates or laws that shame the offenders after they've completed their sentence. **Your focus should be making sure communities provide the 4 critical success factors.**

Do give the DOC the ability to keep offenders who refuse or don't respond to treatment, on supervision beyond the original sentence. Let sex offenders who successfully complete treatment live normal and productive lives. That will help prevent crime!

**Final Word:** Politicians often run on a platform of being tough on crime. Today I'm asking you to **"Be Smart on Crime". Follow known "best practices" - support laws that hold sex offenders accountable, but which also allow those who show transformation to live as full, productive members of the community.**